

RAW PROVOCATIVE HUMANE PLAYS

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Hot Air

a very short holiday play by Katelin Wilcox

Lights up on KIT, CHARLIE, and CJ. They are the giant vintage elf balloons that have preceded the Santa Claus float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade since 1947. Charlie sits grumpily, massaging one knee. Kit is cheerfully doing stretches and physical warm ups. CJ sits quietly in a corner, face ashen.

Charlie Ugh, my legs are stiff.

Kit *(taking a deep breath, continuing to stretch)* Just wait til tomorrow. Once you're fully inflated and floating the friendly skies again you'll feel much better.

Charlie Well, until then, I'm stiff.

Kit You say that *every year*.

Charlie *Excuuuse me.* What would you like to talk about? *(beat)* Lampposts?

Kit shoots Charlie a sharp look and checks to see if CJ heard the comment.

Kit *(whispers)* Not. Cool.

Charlie Hey, CJ! Hey. Buddy. Look, I know it's not the best news. How 'ya doing?

CJ *(suddenly exploding)* HOW DO YOU THINK?!?!

Kit Okay, okay, calm down.

CJ Calm down? Tomorrow morning, my life is going to be in the slippery little hands of the worst balloon handler Macy's has ever seen!

Kit She's... fine!

CJ She's not fine! The texting. The Facebooking. The Instagramming! Last year, Miss "Cell Phone Susie" went one-handed for six blocks, and there was a distinct whiff of spiked eggnog on her breath! SpongeBob was behind her the whole time and saw her weaving all over Herald Square. He was disgusted.

Kit Okay, but nothing happened, right?

CJ That's because she was on Spiderman and Spiderman's got 91 handlers! She's worked at Macy's for what – five minutes? These whippersnappers have no idea

what it takes to be a handler. CONSTANT VIGILANCE! One distracted moment and it's *right into a lamppost* for us! Old Man Wozniak – now HE was a handler. Got me through the Great Gust of '83. What do you think would have happened to me if Cell Phone Susie had been at the reins?

Charlie Settle down drama queen. You've been in storage too long. We've each got 12 handlers. It's not Spidey level, but one delinquent pair of hands isn't the end of the world.

CJ You naïve little fool.

Kit CJ!

Charlie What did you call me?

Charlie rushes CJ, CJ hides behind Kit.

CJ You won't look so tough tomorrow. The cushy days of 12 handlers are over. We've been downsized. Four each.

Charlie *(retreating)* Where did you hear that?

CJ Snoopy got his hands on a copy of this year's parade handbook. And you can bet he had a good laugh.

Charlie *(re: Snoopy)* Smug jerk.

CJ We're not videogame characters or from a Pixar movie. We're irrelevant. Nobody cares about us.

Kit CJ! How can you say that?! We're not irrelevant. People love us!

CJ Who? No one knows our names. No one even knows we HAVE names!

Kit Look, I know we may not be the "hippest" balloons on the block, but we're part of something bigger than that. We're a nostalgic, Christmassy reminder of the coming of Santa Claus. We are heralds of the season.

Charlie *(beat, quietly)* Give it a rest, Kit.

CJ Face it. Tomorrow morning, we're going to be left to the mercy of a few teenyboppers who are more interested in taking selfies than watching where they're going. Well, I'm not going to take it lying down.

Kit What do you mean...?

CJ I mean tomorrow morning when we round the corner of 7th Avenue and Central Park South – I’m breakin’ loose.

Kit gasps.

Kit C – J – Elf. No balloon has ever gone rogue like that. You would violate the code of our very existence and bring shame on this whole family.

CJ Look, Little Miss Sunshine, for the past 65 years we’ve done things your way but you know what – they’ll just have to find someone else to “herald the season.”

Kit But – what’ll happen to you?! Who knows where you could end up!

CJ At least it will be on my terms. And it’ll be a hell of a ride.

Charlie Nobody’s going for “a hell of a ride.” You’re staying right here with us. Jesus, pull it together. Worst case scenario, you get a little snagged, they patch you up.

CJ Tell that to Kermit. He’s never been the same since he took that lamppost to the gut. He’s always drifting to the left! (*quieter*) And public humiliation aside, you and I both know that a patch job is not the “worst case scenario.”

Charlie tries to shush CJ.

Kit What are you talking about?

Charlie Nothing.

CJ I’m talking about PERMANENT STORAGE.

Kit That’s... a myth. A spook story they tell new balloons to keep them in line.

CJ It’s no myth. What do you think happens to balloons that are too damaged to repair? Send them off to... live with some relatives on a farm in the country?? Cat in the Hat. Bullwinkle. Jesus, BARNEY! Stabbed and stomped down like a rabid dog. That parade route is *littered* with corpses of good balloons taken down by lampposts at the hands of negligent handlers.

Kit is aghast.

Charlie That's enough!

Charlie starts toward CJ.

CJ Bring it! I dare you. I am an angry elf balloon and I've got nothing to lose!

Charlie stops. Beat.

Charlie Of course you do. We all do. Did you ever stop to think WHY "Cell Phone Susie" took all those selfies?

CJ Because she's a product of a media-saturated, self-obsessed generation?!

Charlie Yes. But also - because she was doing something worth posting about.

CJ Because she was on Spiderman.

Charlie And do you know why she's NOT on Spiderman this year?

CJ Probably got demoted. Too many mistakes, so they stuck her on a balloon nobody cared about.

Charlie She ASKED to get switched to you.

A beat.

CJ Why?

Charlie "Cell Phone Susie's" last name happens to be Wozniak.

CJ As in...

Charlie As in Old Man Wozniak's daughter.

CJ *(flustered)* Well - clearly balloon handling skill does NOT run in the family.

Charlie Will you give it a rest. Wozniak Senior's not doing too well this year. And if her dad's going to have to watch the parade from a hospital bed, *Susan* wants him to see her walking under the same balloon he handled for 40 years.

Kit How do you know that?

Charlie CJ's not the only one with sources. Spidey can't keep his mouth shut. *(beat)* So.

Whether it's "heralding the season," or putting a smile on a sick old man's face, or – so help me – catching a glimpse of Betty Boop bouncing down 7th Avenue, we've all got skin in this game.

A beat.

Kit Really? Betty?

Charlie Don't judge me. I hate to see her leave, but I love to watch her go.

CJ Betty's not in the parade this year.

Charlie I know that. And you don't see *me* flying the coop.

A beat.

CJ I guess... I could give Cell Ph- uh, *Susan* the... benefit of the doubt –

Kit Really?

CJ But I'm not doing it for her! I'm doing it for him. After 40 years, I owe him that.

Charlie (*sarcastically*) Well, that's the spirit.

Kit And she's gonna post sooo many pictures of you... (*off CJ's wary look*) uh, after – AFTER! – the parade. So much for being "irrelevant"! Who's irrelevant now?!

Charlie *Pikachu.* (*beat*) Seriously. Why is he still a balloon?!

Kit It's... okay Charlie. I'm sure they'll bring Betty back soon.

Kit pats Charlie on the shoulder.

Kit (*cont'd*) In the meantime, (*Kit smiles*) we've got a big day tomorrow...

Kit starts doing the stretches and physical warm ups again, encouraging the others to join. Deep breathing. Calisthenics. Charlie and CJ reluctantly join Kit, rolling their eyes at first, then with more gusto. Lights fade.

END OF PLAY.